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ABSTRACT

Academic achievement of blacks is discussed in terms of sociocultural economic factors. The hypothesis was that there are no differences in measured intelligence between ethnic and racial groups when socioeconomic factors and childhood health care are equalized. Two myths have had profound impact on black education: (1) the belief in the inherent cognitive inferiority of blacks, and (2) the belief that compensatory programs have no impact on later cognitive development of minority children. To help isolate factors that have been found most supportive for black educational achievement and upward mobility, 100 middle income black parents were interviewed. Questions centered around mobility patterns over four generations, the family structure, the kin-help network, and the sources of educational and occupational aspiration. Findings indicated that the two factors most related to the quality of family life were the strong family support system and the desire for a supportive educational system. The conclusion was that the economic status of blacks as a group must be improved if their academic achievement is to improve. Remediation offered by groups such as Head Start will have only limited impact when compared to raising the general economic security of the family. Tables and references are included. (Author/DB)

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Critical Research Issue Affecting
The Quality of Life for Black Americans, Year 2000

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Components of Educational Achievement and Mobility in Black Families

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Components of Educational Achievement and Mobility
in Black Families

Harriette Pipes McAdoo, Ph.D.

As we review the issues related to the quality of life of Blacks in the year 2000, it is necessary to document the family factors that have facilitated mobility and the maintenance of stability in the past. These very factors that have been effective in the past few generations will, in all likelihood, be the most valuable coping strategies in the year 2000 and beyond.

Aspirations for higher educational achievement are a prerequisite for almost the only route of mobility open to the Black individual. The lack of educational achievement will only continue the perpetuation of a downward spiral. It is important to document these factors because of the growing evidence that school achievement and scores on IQ tests are directly related, not to ethnicity, but to the sociocultural economic factors of parental occupation and education (Coleman, 1966; Mercer, 1972; Chase, 1977). Data on school achievement has concisely shown that when socioeconomic factors are equalized, there are no differences in measured intelligence between ethnic/racial groups (Mercer, 1972; Mayeske, 1971). Therefore, to improve academic achievement for a group, it is necessary to improve its economic status. Remediation alone given to a group stressed with poverty will have only limited impact when compared to raising the general economic security of the family.

To help isolate the factors that have been found most supportive for Black mobility a sample of parents of school-age children were selected who were able themselves to manipulate the educational and economic ladder to reach middle income socioeconomic status. To find out how they had coped could lead researchers and policymakers in the direction of formulating policies relating to the family that would be most supportive in providing the

resources from the community agencies that will allow more children from minority families to seek and to achieve higher education.

In examining the Black families in our country there are several assumptions that must be made. The first is that the Black family is composed of a very pluralistic group of domestic units with a great deal of diversity. The second is that without a certain level of financial stability, parents will not have the resources to meet the developmental needs of their children. And the third assumption is that parenting is more difficult for Black and minority parents than for parents from the majority group.

Parenting has been defined as the process by which the family socializes the child into the gender, cultural, and economic roles that the parents and/or the society deem appropriate. The Black parent must guide the child through conflicting developmental tasks. The child must assimilate the dominant views of our society, and at the same time move to actualize his potential. Now a conflict occurs, because these very societal views are the very ones that prevent his reaching his potential. This societal preference for the majority group has been operationalized into an environment that has forced family units to rely upon themselves, rather than upon the wider community educational institutions.

This lack of value of diversity for non-majority groups had been shown in the perpetuation of myths about the minority groups. Two myths that have been assimilated into the mainstream of the society's thoughts have had profound impact: 1) the belief in the inherent cognitive inferiority of Blacks, and 2) the belief that compensatory programs have no impact on later cognitive development of minority children. These beliefs are firmly imbued into the society to an extent that research findings consistent with this view are widely acclaimed,

in spite of faulty or non-existent data and sharp criticism of proponents of these views (Jensen, Moynihan, Shockley and Herrnstein, et al). Meanwhile,data that refute these myths are not picked up by the media and are not translated into current folk-beliefs. Coleman (1966), Mercer (1972), Mayeske (1971), and Chase (1977) have presented carefully designed, large-scale studies and detailed reviews that have factored out the elements that are actually connected with achievement. These elements are basically the environmental press, the economic level of the family and the provision of preventive health services for their children.

Shipman (1977), and Gordan (1977), unlike most researchers who gave up on Head Start when IQ differences were not immediately apparent in early elementary school. have been some of the few researchers who have continued to monitor the achievement patterns of minority children who were enrolled in Head Start and compared them with control groups who had not received this extra help. Their follow-up data have found profound long-term differences between the two groups. The differences in achievement and placement in classes for the retarded are significant, with the Head Start children performing consistently better than the control. Meanwhile, unfortunately, these pre-school programs have been systematically eliminated and decimated across the country.

These recent findings have not been consistent with the prevailing societal preference for racial ability differentiation and the lack of remediation impact. Therefore,these results are not dissiminated to become a part of the training of the next generation of educational and social service professionals or to the present policymakers, who are designing and implementing programs for minority families. The lack of compensatory programs and the belief of lowered ability have resulted in support for warehousing these children in school buildings until they are released, unskilled, to become non-productive adults, perpetuating the

low-achievement cycle. Black family members have had to accept the reality that support for the aspirations for high achievement seldom is found in the public school. The fact that Black families have continued to function at all, despite overwhelming odds, is due to the survival mechanisms that have evolved over generations.

An examination of the research literature offered little direction for the identification of antecedent components of Black family mobility. There is a marked lack of awareness of how the Black family functions,due to several factors. The Black family is often ignored in the research literature, or if studied, only the most problematic families are studied, such as families where the mother is on welfare, or children where the parents are abusive, or families who are receiving free medical aid (Billingsley, 1968). Collecting data in reporting the research on this particular population may be valid for the training of researchers, but as far as its use in policy setting, it can be very dangerous. The reason it is risky is that data gathered from these families, facing the most severe problems in our society, are then generalized to all Black families. The other tendency is to ignore the stable family unit, both Black and white. Black families and the means by which they become mobile, have been ignored in the literature with only one stereotype family type projection being allowed. Many of the policymakers have accepted the stereotypic view as the one view and have implemented policies that have been found to be destructive.

A close evaluation of literature from many sources points to the diversity and the variety of what could be considered valid Black experiences. It must be remembered that historically Blacks came from a variety of cultural groups, both on the Continent and here in America. The slavery experience lead to two

highly differentiated family structures that tended to lead to different mobility patterns. The one group from which most literature is found, and the one from which most stereotypes on the Black family evolved, is the plantation system. The other system is the farm system, about which little is known (Jones, 1965). A slave who had been in the plantation system would have a different experience and a different family structure and family interaction patterns than families who were placed on the smaller farms in the North and in the South. The plantation system, of which Haley's (1976) Kunte Kinte was an example, faced an impersonal economic organization in which the master was the head of all family units and the Black male role was the most vulnerable. However, the economic system required a surplus of males; therefore, an adequate supply of male models were available for the children in the family units. On the farms brutality was also found; however, because of the economic system evolving there, the Black family tended to work as an economic unit of kin dependent upon the leadership of the adult man. The slave families tended to be patricental, with the male recognized as the head of household. From these two patterns, coupled with the diversity provided by the different cultural and religious groups from Africa, evolved a unique family form which was neither African nor mainstream. It evolved into the creation of Afro-American family life style.

In one examination of the plantation-based units, Gutman did test Moynihan's hypothesis (1976). Gutman felt that if a male-absent household with a disorganized family was the modal form perpetuated as the result of slavery, then the structural form should be even more common during and immediately after slavery. He examined the birth, death, marriage records, slave transferral records and U.S. Census, and found that data to support Moynihan's hypothesis were not available. Indications of strong family units were found dating from the middle of

the slave period into the early part of this century.

Lewis (1967) has pointed out that the tendency to analyze data by skin color rather than by income level has added support to the "slavery specific hypothesis". Low income Blacks are routinely compared in research with higher income whites, providing significant family structural differences, interpreted as racial, that are actually socio-economic differences. These interpretations only added faulty support to the "culture of poverty" hypothesis (Gutman, 1976).

There have been several empirical studies that have found similar results, but because of inherent bias within the social science literature, they are not widely known. Another historian found results similar to Gutman's for the Nineteenth Century. Lammermeier (1974) used the 1850-1880 U.S. Census, the vital records, city directories and tax assessments to obtain information on 80,000 Blacks who lived in seven cities along the Ohio River. He, too, found that the predominant Black family unit consisted of a mother and father, with the family often extended by the presence of elderly or unmarried relatives.

In a recent study of 1651 Black families, randomly selected from 25 metropolitan areas, Heis (1975) summarized his findings on the Black families in this manner: 1) the majority live in nuclear households; the Black are more likely to live in multi-generational units; 2) a majority of Black children live in families of six or more; 3) a relatively weak relationship between objective SES indicators and Black family structure; 4) most Black families are not female-dominated, even in lower status groups; 5) men who were brought up in female-controlled homes are not feminine in their behavior; 6) the age of marriage is late, 60% of lower status Black women marry after age 18, while 60% of the men marry after age 21.

The most recent data on Black family structure is found in the 1975 Census data. The typical Black family was found to be in two-parent household units with stable marriages (U.S. Census, 1975), yet the stereotype of female-headed homes continues to be disseminated via the media and professional training.

The data are clear on Black family structure. Furthermore, the financial vulnerability of Black families that limits educational advancement is becoming even clearer. Blacks have experienced discrimination in the form of isolation from the economic and educational mainstream of our society. The sad facts of life are that without adequate finances, parents are unable to have the resources available to meet the developing needs of their children. While a degree of economic mobility may have been occurring, over 62% of Blacks in the United States in 1974 earned less than $10,000, compared to approximately 30% of the non-Blacks. Ten thousand dollars was the standard set by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as the absolute minimum that an urban family of four could live upon with any degree of security. In the majority of units, both poor and non-poor, the husband is the main breadwinner. Both parents work in 84% of the families, but the wife earns only one-third of the total family income (Nat'l Urban League, 1975). Data have repeatedly shown that educational achievement is related to the family income more than it is related to any other criteria, whether it is sex, race, length of time in the country, or educational curriculum. Therefore, the lower income would be seen as the strongest contributor to lack of Black educational attainment.

In 1974 the Black-to-white median income ratio was 58%, the same as in 1973. In 1975 the Black male head-of-household earned a median income of $10,365, yet the female head-of-household, representing 25-30% of the dwelling units, only earned $4,465. Black males only now earn what white males earned in 1963 (U.S.

Census, 1975). The recent recession wiped out much of the progress of the last few years, resulting in a decline in the proportion of middle-income Black families. A decline also occurred in multiple Black earners, while an increase occurred among non-Black families (Hill, 1976). In other words, as the middle income white female was entering the labor market, the Black female, both middle and lower income, was being laid off, demoted, or prevented from entering the job market.

The breakdown of income in the United States of race x sex shows that the lowest paid working group has consistently been the Black female, whether as wife or as head of household. The sex discrimination hurts Black families harder because, contrary to the stereotyped, they are more dependent upon the two incomes, based on the fact that the Black male is underpaid for comparable education and occupation. In 1974, white female heads of household had a median income of $7,019, while the Black female heads only earned $4,595, a ratio of .65 of the non-Black one-parent family income (Urban League, 1975). The economic forces have resulted in a higher percentage of Black families having homes with single parents. During the recession more mothers were forced to move in with their children, or with relatives. By 1974, 33% of Black children were living in units headed by a relative other than the father (Hill, 1976). This was part of the supportive family network structures that have evolved over the centuries that tend to offset the vulnerability of the single-parent household. The evolvement of families in extended familism tends to increase the farther the family is placed from the American mainstream. The discrimination and racism experienced by some ethnic groups (Blacks, Jews, recent migrants) has continued to reinforce the necessity of the families to support each other. The extended kin-help patterns are not unique to Blacks, but are common in most minority groups. The kin-help patterns do tend to intensify

under poorer economic conditions.

The mechanisms of kin-help patterns have been found in many forms: the extended family structure, the close interaction between domestic units, the equalitarian parent relationship and the kin-help system. The kin-help system has been well documented by Stack (1974) and Billingsley (1968). The family is seen as providing one of the screens of opportunity that have facilitated educational mobility as the kin and non-kin units have supported the domestic functionings of the family. However, a conflicting role of the kin-help exchange has been often overlooked. A. McQueen (1971) in his study of working class families in Washington, D.C., found that the individual who attempted to be upwardly mobile had to cut himself off. Stack (1977) found that the reciprocal obligations of the kin-help system prevented stable marriages and often was a drain on the resources of the individual. Stack found that her families did not cut themselves off, as in McQueen's study, however, the families did tend to participate in a system in which they gave loans to the other members, not expecting repayment. These mobile families thus created an unequal situation in relation to the "loans" that tended to stifle the unending request for money. By this process, the mobile individual may fulfill past obligations and limit ongoing ones, while at the same time providing himself with greater flexibility in seeking mobility goals. Yet this individual had still paid his dues to the kin help "insurance policy" that will provide a cushion in case he, too, falls from this vulnerable position.

This research attempted to test what patterns existed within the Black family after this mobility occurred. Even the middle-income families have a certain vulnerability. As they become mobile they have two choices: they can continue the involvement in the kin-help pattern, or cut themselves off, isolating them-

selves from the family of orientation and the kin-help network, to concentrate the resources on the family of procreation. Interest and concern in this area lead to the design of the study in which we looked at the mobility patterns over four generations, the family structure, the kin-help network, and the sources of educational and occupational aspirations.

Data were collected independently from both mothers and fathers of school-age children. The fathers were interviewed by Black males and the mothers by Black females. Each family participated in a total of five to seven hours of intensive interviews. The subjects were 100 parents of school-age children between the ages of 6 and 18, who were still in the home. This represented 60 domestic units, 42 fathers and 58 mothers. All of the parents were over the age of 25, and both parents had to have had some college education. The minimal income for a single-parent family was $10,000 and for two-parent families was $14,000. Comparable samples were selected from an urban and a suburban site in the mid-Atlantic area. The suburban families were randomly drawn from a census list of Black families and matching Census tracts of the urban families were found based on education and occupation.

Seventy-three percent of the parents were in two-parent units and 27% were in one-parent units, a match of the U.S. Census breakdown. The incomes were high for both groups, higher in the urban center than in the suburban site, because both parents were professionals and both were working. The urban median income was $35,000, the average suburban was $28,000. Consistent with Urban League (1975) finding from the U.S. Census of the inequity of the financial rewards given Black women, we found that Black women were earning $9,000 less than the Black men, in spite of the fact that all were college educated and were well-trained professionals.

In looking at the mobility patterns over four generations, three points of mobility were available, assuming that all children were born in a middle income status. Six different mobility patterns were found: upwardly mobile, two patterns of downward mobility, one pattern in which the families had been middle income over three generations. This was a highly mobile group of individuals. Only 27% were born into middle income status. Seventy-three percent had reached this status based upon their own educational and occupational efforts. Eighty-nine percent of the families had experienced some kind of mobility over the three generations. Because the income and the educational status that they had attained was more unusual for Black than white citizens, we examined the source of their drive for educational attainment and tried to find what had been the motivating forces that they felt had contributed to their reaching the status that they now had. The parents gave very strong expression to the fact that the drive for higher education was instilled early by the parents. They indicated the great sacrifices made by family members to help them reach this status. Their mobility was not seen as an individualistic effort, but rather as the result of a group effort and the cooperation of kin and non-kin.

Another point strongly brought up by these parents, many of whom were in the mid-30s to 40s in age, was the differences in their experiences as children compared to the experiences their own children were having. Many of them had attended segregated schools in the South and in the North. They felt that these schools were a strong source of their higher aspirations. The teachers, who were all Black, had made very strong demands upon those whom they felt had the ability to achieve and they felt their quest for higher education was strongly supported by the teachers. They indicated a close tie existed between the home and the school, reinforcing the belief that education was the only way out of poverty.

All of the subjects' children now attended integrated schools, many of them attending prestigious private schools and "better" public schools in the Washington area. The parents felt that their children were missing out on certain elements because of the integrated school system. They felt that the children were facing lower expectations on the part of the teachers, in spite of the awareness of the high educational achievement of the parents. The parents also felt that the children had reduced confidence in their ability because of the racism they were experiencing. The parents feared that the strong drive for educational achievement was not being reinforced and, therefore, the children would rot have the motivation for higher education in spite of the parental expectations, thereby preventing the children from becoming as well educated and as occupationally mobile as they themselves were. Overall the parents did not indicate that the schools were adequately meeting the needs of their children.

We then went on to examine the continuation of the cultural pattern of kin help for the middle income parents. We found that the parents had not cut themselves off from their family of orientation. Both during and after mobility, extensive help had continued. The reciprocal obligations felt within the family were not seen as oppressive. The parents felt positive about the help received, and they expected help when they were in a situation to need it. They felt that this cultural pattern had not been disrupted by mobility. Despite the high income level of these parents they were still receiving support from their kin; aid in the form of emotional support and money. Continuing through the period of striving to increase income and education, and often mobility to suburban home sites, the families had not removed themselves from their cultural patterns. They were giving more than they received; in fact, they had increased the provision of help more since they had been mobile, rather than decreasing it, as

was found in McQueen's study. One difference was found between the parents in the two sites: while parents in the suburban and the urban center were all involved, parents in the city tended to be more involved on an emotional level with the provisions of counseling and support, very frequent visiting, while the suburban parents were involved more on a material level. They provided emotional support, but the geographical distance prevented frequent visitation, as was often common in the other families, therefore help was more often found in the provision of material goods. In spite of the different form, the involvement was intensive and extensive. The kin exchange was perpetuated and it was something that was viewed as a very warm part of their family life.

In reviewing the responses in the data from our families, as we tried to factor out what the factors were that were most related to the quality of family life, we found that two strong elements continuously appeared. The first was the strong family support system, and the second was the desire for an educational system that was supportive of the family drive toward higher educational aspirations. These factors are closely related to the findings that achievement was greater when a close rapport exists between home and school and when cultural expectations are mutually shared by both sources of significant influence on the child's life. Programs that are attempting to support mobility must be in cultural agreement, should be aware of the close involvement of kin and fictive kin found in minority families, and should attempt to eradicate stereotypes held about Black individuals, families, and less economically secure persons in general, in order that the quality of life may be improved in the years to come.

Table 1

Reported Individual Income Levels and
Actual Family Incomes by Sex and Demography

	Individual Income				Family Income	
	Urban		Suburban		Urban	Suburb
	Men	Women	Men	Women		
N	31	36	11	22	37	23
Range	3,999-35,000	3,000-32,500	9,500-35,000	3,000-22,500	11,000-60,000	9,500-60,000
Mean	25,214	15,717	23,539	14,575	35,475	28,205
SD	8,925	10,233	9,604	6,180	11,670	15,724
Group Difference	-9,497		-8,964		-7,270	

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Responses to
"Most Help Received From ..."

Groups	Most Help Received from: Family N	%	Friends N	%	Fam/Fri Equally N	%	Community Agencies N	%	All 3 Equally N	%	No One N	%	Total N	%
Urban	33	(49)	16	(24)	6	(9)	2	(3)	3	(5)	7	(10)	67	(67)
Suburban	9	(27)	7	(21)	5	(15)	1	(3)	6	(18)	5	(15)	33	(33)
One parent	6	(38)	5	(31)	2	(13)	0	-	3	(19)	0	-	16	(16)
Two parent	36	(43)	18	(21)	9	(11)	3	(4)	6	(7)	12	(14)	84	(84)
U 1-parent	2	(33)	3	(50)	1	(17)	0	-	0	-	0	-	6	(6)
U 2-parent	31	(51)	13	(21)	5	(8)	2	(3)	3	(5)	7	(12)	61	(61)
S 1-parent	4	(4)	2	(20)	1	(10)	0	-	3	(30)	0	-	10	(10)
S 2-parent	5	(2)	5	(22)	4	(17)	1	(4)	3	(13)	5	(22)	23	(23)
Total	42		23		11		3		9		12		100	(100)

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Amount of Help Received from Family and Friends

	Urban		Suburban		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Help Received from Family						
Very great deal	20	(36)	5	(15)	25	(25)
Great deal	21	(31)	13	(39)	34	(34)
Some	12	(18)	4	(12)	16	(16)
Very little	9	(13)	6	(18)	15	(15)
None	5	(7)	5	(15)	10	(10)
Total	67	(100)	33	(99)	100	(100)
Help Received from Friends						
Very great deal	29	(43)	17	(52)	46	(46)
Great deal	21	(31)	8	(24)	29	(29)
Some	13	(20)	5	(15)	18	(18)
Very little	2	(3)	3	(9)	5	(5)
None	2	(3)	0	-	2	(2)
Total	67	(100)	33	(100)	100	(100)

Table 4

Frequency Distribution of Help Given to
Family and Friends and Help Received from Family and Friends

	Help Received					
	Family			Friends		
	Urban	Suburb	Total	Urban	Suburb	Total
Financial support	27 (25)	11 (19)	38 (23)	8 (8)	5 (8)	13 (8)
Emotional support and counseling	27 (25)	16 (27)	43 (26)	42 (44)	22 (35)	64 (40)
Child care and care taking	18 (17)	9 (15)	27 (16)	18 (19)	11 (18)	29 (18)
Clothing, furniture, and general gifts	8 (8)	13 (22)	21 (13)	4 (4)	8 (13)	12 (8)
General help	5 (5)	1 (2)	6 (4)	7 (7)	4 (6)	11 (7)
Labor assistance	4 (4)	2 (3)	6 (4)	4 (4)	6 (10)	10 (6)
None	18 (17)	7 (12)	25 (15)	13 (14)	7 (11)	20 (13)
Total	107 (101)	59 (100)	166 (101)	96 (100)	63 (101)	159 (100)

	Help Given					
	Family			Friends		
	Urban	Suburb	Total	Urban	Suburb	Total
Financial support	35 (28)	20 (27)	55 (28)	23 (19)	13 (19)	36 (19)
Emotional support and counseling	31 (25)	18 (24)	49 (25)	42 (34)	19 (28)	61 (32)
Child care and care taking	21 (17)	8 (11)	29 (15)	17 (14)	11 (16)	28 (15)
Clothing, furniture, and general gifts	15 (12)	19 (26)	34 (17)	12 (10)	13 (19)	25 (13)
General help	9 (7)	1 (1)	10 (5)	11 (9)	2 (3)	13 (7)
Labor assistance	9 (7)	3 (4)	12 (6)	9 (7)	6 (9)	15 (8)
None	6 (5)	5 (7)	11 (6)	9 (7)	5 (7)	14 (7)
Total	125(101)	74(100)	200(102)	123(100)	69(101)	192(101)

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